Why is the Audience Important?
Writers do not get to determine the clarity and value of their argument, ideas, and writing skills; instead, their readers do. Factoring the audience into your writing ensures that you have provided necessary context, explained your argument clearly, ideas are well organized, and that the readers who should understand your writing, can.

How to Determine Audience
You should determine your audience when you are reviewing an assignment and choosing a topic. Often, your professor will give you your audience –themselves, your peers in class, the public, etc.– but it is not always provided. The audience of a piece of writing is often implied by its format; a personal statement for grad school will likely be reviewed by the professors you would work with, a policy memo would be read by public policy experts in that subject, and literary analysis would be read by someone who is well-versed in the literature. If you cannot determine your audience, consider:

❖ Who would usually read this writing?
❖ Who can I ask to help me determine my audience?
❖ What content changes, depending on what audience I write to?
❖ What would you write for a “general” audience (no specific field or topic knowledge)?

Writing for your Audience
The features that make your audience distinct: age, education, values, assumptions, and more can affect what clear, persuasive writing looks like for them. Factoring these features into your writing makes it easier to provide necessary background information and craft a persuasive argument. Avoid making assumptions or generalizations about your audience that could result in writing that is belittling or disrespectful, such as over explaining concepts or assumptions of biased views. Consider the following features of a paper and how your audience may affect them.

Background Information and Explanations: Consider whether your audience knows a lot of information about your topic already, or if this may be their first time learning about it. How comprehensively you write about background information, explain terms and ideas, and set up your argument is determined by your audience.

Vocabulary/Terminology: The vocabulary and technical terms you use are set by how knowledgeable your audience is in your topic. A PhD in the field you are writing in will be familiar with topic-specific terms and acronyms, but the public may not be. Define terms that are unfamiliar to your audience.

Structure/Organization: Prior knowledge on a topic, understanding of the relationship between ideas, and the ability to understand multi-part arguments can all affect whether your structure and argument is clear or not. Keep in mind whether the connections between ideas are clear, whether you change topics smoothly, and what your audience is likely to understand implicitly and explicitly.

Rhetoric/Persuasion: In persuasive and argumentative writing, your audience is especially important because you are attempting to convince them of something through your writing. Your audience in persuasive writing could have similar views as you and agree with you easily, or they could have diverging views and need more persuasive arguments and more evidence to support your argument than other audiences.